



Exhibited artwork Flotsam and Jetsam (Portmanteau) in group exhibition Wordsworth and Basho: Walking Poets, Wordsworth Museum, 2014.

Mc Hugh, C. (Author). (2018). Exhibited artwork Flotsam and Jetsam (Portmanteau) in group exhibition Wordsworth and Basho: Walking Poets, Wordsworth Museum, 2014.. Exhibition, Cornerhouse Publications.

[Link to publication record in Ulster University Research Portal](#)

Publication Status:

Published (in print/issue): 24/05/2018

Document Version

Publisher's PDF, also known as Version of record

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walking Poets

WORDSWORTH AND BASHŌ: WALKING POETS



Art Editions North

First published in 2014 by Art Editions North on the occasion of the exhibition
Wordsworth and Bashō: Walking Poets
At Dove Cottage & the Wordsworth Museum
24 May to 2 November 2014

Art Editions North is an imprint of the University of Sunderland
Co-published with the Wordsworth Trust

Production, design and curation of catalogue by Manny Ling
Edited by Mike Collier and Janet Ross
Catalogue entries by Carol McKay

The exhibition *Wordsworth and Bashō: Walking Poets* has been curated by
Mike Collier and Janet Ross of WALK (Walking, Art, Landskip and Knowledge) at
the University of Sunderland

Exhibition organized by Mike Collier and Janet Ross assisted by Ayako Tani and
Christopher McHugh

Exhibition and technical design by Arnaud Moinet

Printed by W M Print Limited, Walsall

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A British Library CIP record is available
ISBN: 978-1-906832-20-9

Distributed by Cornerhouse Publications
70 Oxford Street, Manchester M1 5NH, England
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fax: + 44 (0) 161 200 1504
email: publications@cornerhouse.org
www.cornerhouse.org/publications



CHRISTOPHER MCHUGH

28. *Flotsam and Jetsam (Portmanteau)*

2014

Porcelain, terracotta, soda glass, mixed media

120 x 60 x 50 cm

McHugh's work responds to themes of memory and the ephemerality of the human condition in the work of both Bashō and Wordsworth. While Bashō often revisited ruins and other sites of communal memory in his poetry, Wordsworth was concerned that human endeavour—both monuments and works of literature—were at risk of destruction through catastrophe and would be outlasted by nature. Both poets were also interested in uncovering for posterity the marginalised histories of everyday folk (the flotsam and jetsam) they met on the road.

Similarly, throughout much of his ceramic work McHugh evokes potentially overlooked narratives and materialises that which otherwise might remain absent. 'Flotsam and Jetsam (Portmanteau)' is an installation piece consisting of hundreds of mainly slipcast and press-moulded ceramic components. By combining durable ceramic elements with an ephemeral, reworkable mode of presentation,

the 'scarred' porcelain fragments in the installation occupy an ambivalent position somewhere between absence and presence, manifesting a sense of enduring loss and melancholia. Blades of grass made from soda glass grow through the ceramic assemblage, suggesting the endurance of nature over culture.

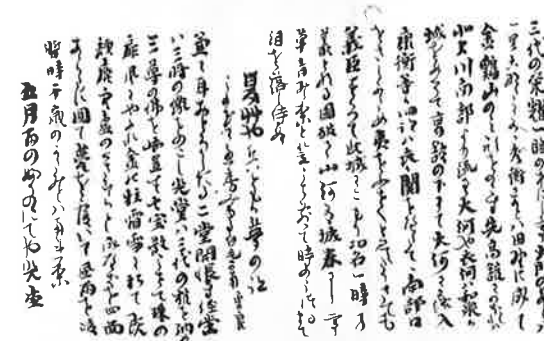


Figure 24, A section of Buson's scroll 1 ('The Narrow Road to the Deep North') containing *The Summer Grass haiku*. Courtesy of Kyoto National Museum

The installation title references Wordsworth's portmanteau suitcase which is on display in Dove Cottage and alludes to Bashō's 'The Records of a Travel-Worn Satchel'. A portmanteau is also a word formed through the combination of two or more other words, resulting in a new meaning. This piece synthesises something of the essence of both poets, repackaging their words into a new object with contemporary resonances. It is inspired by verses 68–92 of Wordsworth's *The Ruined Cottage* and a *haiku* written by Bashō when he visited the abandoned castle at Hiraizumi in 1689 (see figure 24).



Flotsam and Jetsam (Portmanteau), installation shot



Flotsam and Jetsam (Portmanteau), installation shot

Flotsam and Jetsam (Portmanteau) (detail)

$\begin{array}{r} 276 \\ 35 \\ \hline 311 \end{array}$

My Dear
Love

